Terry Haven Celebrates Two Decades of Work with Voices for Utah Childre

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Written by: Terry Haven



Today is my 20th anniversary with Voices for Utah Children. A lot has happened over the last 20 years and I would like to take this opportunity to share some of my thoughts. To begin with, when I first started with Voices for Utah Children it was just called Utah Children. I like the new name as it reflects more of what we do here, speaking up, speaking out and being a voice for kids at all policymaking levels.

That's something that hasn't changed. Voices was created to address areas of concern such as child care, child health, child nutrition, prevention of child abuse, and other issues that impacted children whose parents were least able to advocate for them. Utah Children was established in 1985 as an advocacy group that would not provide direct services, but would provide a voice for Utah children in public policy decisions. Today, Voices for Utah Children stays true to its roots and works to ensure children's needs are prioritized by our lawmakers. For over 30 years, Voices for Utah Children has been making sure that all kids in Utah are ready to learn and that they and their families are healthy and economically secure.

While our mission has remained the same, the way we do our work has evolved. When I first started at Voices we were still using floppy discs in some of our computers! There were no listservs, no webinars, no google chats or social media. These have enhanced our work, helped us connect to colleagues all over the world,

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enabled us to share ideas and solicit advice, and even fundraise in new and different ways. However, much of what we do still involves good old fashioned sitting down face-to-face and talking, meeting with legislators and helping them understand the complex issue of child poverty, training citizens to become advocates themselves, and educating others on the important issues facing our kids.

On a more personal note, during my 20 years at Voices I have had the opportunity to work with so many amazing people. I had the pleasure of working with Roz McGee, the woman who hired me and my first friend when I moved here 20 years ago. She taught me so much, including effective ways to engage people and nurture their strengths and the fine art of diplomacy (though I could still use a little help in that area). Our next CEO Karen Crompton taught me the importance of networking and collaborating. I never quite mastered those organizational skills that she was so good at, but she helped me understand the effectiveness of teamwork. We have a new CEO now and I'm sure that Lincoln Nehring will teach me things as well. And this time around I may just have a few things to teach him. I have worked with the cream of the crop in terms of our staff; they have come and gone but they have all been professional, bright, caring, and committed individuals who gave of themselves to better the lives of Utah's kids.

I have been doing KIDS COUNT work for almost 24 years. Twenty years here and three and a half in South Dakota. I can't say enough about the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the KIDS COUNT staff. This foundation is made up of the most amazing, top-notch professionals that I have ever worked with. In every department, at every level, they have been accessible, encouraging, and let's face it, economically supportive of my work. My work with Casey has given me the opportunity to meet advocates from all over the country who do the same work that I do. We have learned together, bounced ideas off each other, and frankly, copied each other's work. I value their dedication, expertise and, most of all, friendship.

I'm proud of the work we've done and will continue to do at Voices. We helped pass the initial CHIP bill in 1997 which has provided health insurance for a generation of children. We improved safety measures that have positively impacted the child and teen death rates. We made it possible for children to attend quality preschool and go to kindergarten all day, both helping kids start school ready to learn and helping them stay in school long term. These are just a few of the positive impacts that Voices has made.

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We will keep making those positive impacts. I know this because there are children in Utah who still lag behind their peers, who still go to bed hungry, and who still desperately need a voice. Until we have a state where all children's needs are fully funded and where all children have the same opportunities to learn, grow and succeed, we will continue to be their voice. I'm so proud to work for an organization that uses critical thinking, unbiased compassion, and skillful means to make a difference in the lives of children and families in Utah. Who knows, maybe I'll write another blog about my 25th or 30th year at Voices.

For 30 years now, Voices for Utah Children has called on our state, federal and local leaders to put children's needs first. But the work is not done. The children of 30 years ago now have children of their own. Too many of these children are growing up in poverty, without access to healthcare or quality educational opportunities.

How can you be involved?

Make a tax-deductible donation to Voices for Utah Children—or join our Network with a monthly donation of $20 or more. Network membership includes complimentary admission to Network events with food, socializing, and opportunity to meet child advocacy experts. And don't forget to join our listserv to stay informed!

We look forward to the future of Voices for Utah Children and we hope you will be a part of our next 30 years.

Special thanks to American Express for sponsoring our 30th Anniversary Year.

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